

Special Education Advisory Panel Meeting Minutes

Office of Public Instruction

Helena

January 20-21, 2005

Members in Attendance: Russ Bean, Diana Colgrove, Dick Slonaker, Norma Wadsworth, Janet Jansen, WyAnn Northrop, Gary Perleberg

Members Excused: Jeff Stelloh, Bob Maffit, Bob Peake, Steve Gibson, Holly Raser, Cody Sinnott

Non-Members in Attendance: Bob Runkel, Marilyn Pearson, Steve Gettel, Sarah Eyer, Barb Rolf, Tim Harris, Dick Trerise, Frank Podobnik, Pat Reichert, Marlene Wallis

Thursday, January 20, 2005

Chairman Russ Bean called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. The Panel members and guests introduced themselves. Russ requested that the Panel members review the Proposed Agenda. Following review of the Proposed Agenda, Gary Perleberg moved to accept the proposed agenda, Janet Jansen seconded the motion and the motion passed. The minutes of the October 28-29, 2004, meeting were reviewed and Gary Perleberg moved to accept the minutes and WyAnn Northrop seconded the motion. The motion passed and the minutes were approved as written.

Services and Resources for Deaf and Hearing Impaired Students

Steve Gettel, Superintendent, Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind (MSDB), presented an overview of the MSDB. He said that the MSDB is a state-funded school and is the only school that receives a direct appropriation from the Legislature.

The major goals of the school are to provide: parent services; early educational intervention; specialized educational services; students with a comprehensive educational and instructional program from preschool to 12th grade; students with vocational education and training; and students with comprehensive residential facilities.

Steve noted that the MSDB uses an Individual Education Program (IEP) planning process that is conducted annually for each student enrolled. This IEP determines the child's placement, whether it is at the MSDB, public schools, or a combination of the two. The school's full-time staff includes a school psychologist, physical therapist, occupational therapist, orientation and mobility specialist, audiologist, speech pathologist and experienced educators.

Steve discussed some of the problems that the school encounters, such as hiring teachers with a Master's degree and having the ability to pay them. Another problem is acquiring equipment and materials for the school.

Hearing Impairment/Deafness: Early Identification and Intervention

Sarah Eyer noted that only two out of 1,000 babies are born deaf and 17 out of 1,000 18 year olds are deaf. She said that 94 percent of children with hearing loss are not deaf. The population of children who are hard of hearing is shifting and there is less than half the number of children with severe profound hearing loss than there were 10 years ago. She said that parental involvement is critical with deaf children. It is important that there is early identification and that children are labeled correctly. Sarah informed the Panel that there are teachers of the deaf who cannot sign.

Sarah provided a handout titled "Impact of Early Identification and Intervention of Deaf and Hard-of-hearing Infants." She noted that early identification of hearing loss can be done prior to six months of age. This should be followed by immediate and appropriate intervention. Children who are identified early and receive intervention prior to six months of age have significantly better receptive language, expressive language, and personal/social skills. The late-identified children have developmental language quotients which remain at 50-60 percent of their chronological age throughout their early childhood period.

Sarah also distributed a handout regarding "The Impact of Hearing Loss on Education." This handout provides 13 pertinent facts about hearing loss and its impact on the lives of children. Another handout Sarah provided was "Deafness: A Fact Sheet."

Sarah is working on an awareness pamphlet for parents.

Visual Impairment/Blindness

Barb Rolf, Outreach Vision Specialist, noted that the needs of the child must be assessed. Obtaining a medical diagnosis from the medical doctor is important—is the eye condition stable; has the condition worsened; what type of services are recommended; if degenerative, consult with school; suggest Braille. Barb said that staying on top of the situation and working closely with the pediatric ophthalmologist are important factors for parents.

Barb said that teachers of the visually impaired must be knowledgeable in the field, not just in Braille. The teacher needs to observe how the child is dealing with his/her condition and act as the liaison between the medical staff and the parent. The teacher must be self-motivated and have passion and commitment for their caseloads.

Educating parents on how to better work with schools and agencies is important. There are times when parents have no one to connect with. The summer programs conducted by the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind were discussed.

Barb noted that the future for deaf/blind students is in Outreach. Equitable (quality) education needs to be assured for children.

Educational Resources [Technology, Educational Interpreter Training Project, Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA)]

There are resources available from the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind; Parents, Let's Unite for Kids (PLUK) lending library; and the state library.

Marilyn Pearson discussed the Educational Interpreter Certification Program (EICP). This program is a blended delivery, distance learning opportunity that uses a variety of technologies to bring classes to participants' home communities and gives them an opportunity to take part in an on-site Summer Institute each year. The program currently serves educational interpreters working with students who are deaf and hard of hearing in K-12 schools of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming.

It was suggested that the Panel schedule a meeting at the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind sometime in the future.

Services for Deaf-Blind

Francisco Román, Deaf-Blind Specialist for the Office of Public Instruction, presented an Overview of the Services Provided by the Montana Deaf-Blind Project and Common Issues Affecting this Unique Population. He reported the project consists of the following goals:

Goal 2 is "Identification of Children who are Deaf-Blind." Objectives to reach Goal 2 include: Implementing a standardized user-friendly, multiple-method process for referral to the Project; and providing a comprehensive, all-inclusive array of technical assistance and training services, based on innovative and best practice methods, to teachers and service providers providing services to children and young adults with deaf-blindness.

Goal 3, Family Services, is to provide individual family-oriented technical assistance and training designed to empower families on their involvements in the education of children who are deaf-blind. Objectives to reach Goal 3 include providing: Project services to families in an individual family-centered, culturally sensitive, and user-friendly manner; individualized support for families to access necessary resources, support services and agencies; a comprehensive, all-inclusive array of technical assistance and training services; and incorporate follow-up activities into the delivery of all technical assistance and training services.

Goal 4, Technical Assistance to Education and Service Provider Personnel, is to provide technical assistance and training designed to make possible the implementation of best practices in the provision of education and related services for children with deaf-blindness. Objectives to reach this goal include: Implement a user-friendly process to help education and service provider personnel access Project services and resources; Provide a comprehensive, all-inclusive array of technical assistance and training services; Incorporate follow-up activities into the delivery of all technical assistance and training services.

Francisco discussed issues affecting services and resources. He said that communication is usually the number one priority, issue, and/or challenge in the education of children and young adults with deaf-blindness.

At the conclusion of the presentations, Dick Slonaker commended all the presenters.

Friday, January 21, 2005

Russ Bean, Chair, reconvened the Panel Meeting at 8:15 a.m.

Following Marilyn's discussion of the Educational Interpreter Certification Program (EICP) on Thursday, it was recommended that more discussion be added to the agenda for Friday's meeting. WyAnn Northrop moved to add the Educational Interpreter Certification Program to Friday's agenda, Gary Perleberg seconded the motion and the motion passed.

OPI Report

Legislative Activities

Bob Runkel provided copies of the "Special Education Report to the 2005 Montana Legislature" to the Panel members. Bob went through the report discussing: Population of Students Served; Student Identification by Disability; Funding Distribution; and the Annual Performance Report. He pointed out the charts and graphs included in the report. He informed the Panel that child count shows that there is a decrease in overall general education and that special education had a steady rise. Bob noted that there is a higher dropout with students with disabilities.

Bob distributed copies of the "Overview of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Testimony Prepared for the Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on Education (January 17, 2005)." The document provided an overview of the purposes of the IDEA and provided information about the recent reauthorization of the federal law known as IDEA '04. The IDEA '04 was signed by President George W. Bush on December 3, 2004. The effective date for most of the provisions of the law is July 1, 2005.

Bob noted that IDEA '04 has many changes that will impact parents, teachers and school administrators. The Panel will be involved in revising state regulations, policies, and procedures to ensure they are consistent with the new law. Bob said that perhaps the biggest change is the effort to align IDEA with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Other areas of change include: reduction in paperwork; the way we determine student's eligibility for special education in the area of learning disabilities; additional flexibility for schools in the use of IDEA funds; additional authority for administrators in student discipline; the law encourages conflict resolution and establishing certain limits on due process hearings and litigation; changes in the U.S. Department of Education's procedures for the monitoring of states; and the U.S. Department of Education now has a scheduled set of interventions which may lead to sanctions imposed on states for noncompliance.

Bob provided the council with information on bills before the Montana State Legislature affecting special education. These bills include appropriation bills, as well as a special education bill that addresses a number of state statutes. After Bob gave an overview of the legislative process on appropriations, he then explained that there is a present law adjustment proposed

which will bring state funding for special education up to the current level of funding that schools received in the 2004-2005 school year. There also are two new proposals, one proposed by the Martz administration and one proposed by the Schweitzer administration. Together, the two new proposals would increase special education funding by 5.5 percent in the 2005-2006 school year and approximately 2 percent in the 2006-2007 school year. The office is also requesting increases of 3 percent per year to fund the audiology contracts and a one time only request to update audiology equipment.

Bob also explained the Special Education bill that amends a number of areas of current law. This bill accomplishes three things:

1. Alignment of state law with the recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), most notably in the area of surrogate parent appointment procedures. The new federal law limits the timeline of appointment to 30 days. State law permits up to 75 days.
2. By removing specific reference to "child study teams," the OPI may be able to take better advantage of opportunities for paperwork reduction and possibly combine meetings that often are conducted separately; and
3. Providing "cleanup" of statutory language in three areas. Certain statutes are slated for repeal or amendment that affects transportation and tuition. These are already covered under state transportation and tuition law. References to program approval found in a number of statutes are removed. Program approval is a remnant of state laws pertaining to special education funding prior to the implementation of a block grant funding formula appointment to 30 days. State law permits up to 75 days.

Educational Interpreter Certification Program

Marilyn informed the Panel that Montana does not have standards for educational interpreters and as a result, there are multiple problems. Educational interpreters have no incentive to improve upon their skills, school administrators do not have any guidance in knowing what skill level an educational interpreter should have, or strive for, and educational interpreters lack recognition, both financially and professionally for the unique skills and knowledge required to be an effective interpreter in the classroom. Almost all states are working on the development of standards or already have them. Montana already has critical components in place that are foundational to the development of standards. These are the Educational Interpreting Certificate Project which is a sequenced course of study for Educational Interpreters and the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) which provides a measure of Educational Interpreters skills and knowledge to effectively interpret in the PreK-12 classroom setting.

Marilyn asked if the Panel was in support of developing standards for Educational Interpreters, recognizing that it is difficult and, in some cases, near impossible to fill vacancies of educational interpreters, especially in more rural and remote locations. If standards were developed, they could be designed in such manner that they recognize different skill levels and incorporate requirements for professional development plans for those interpreters to reach the highest level. Standards developed with such features would allow for educational interpreters to work if they have demonstrated a 'base level' of sign language skills, while at the same time continuing to

improve their skills while working on a professional development plan to increase their skill level. Marilyn commented that some states have set standards so high that it has resulted in states having to go to emergency certification or waivers. We would want to avoid this.

Dick Slonaker moved that the Panel direct the Office of Public Instruction to develop general standards for Educational Interpreters. Norma Wadsworth seconded the motion and the motion passed.

Agenda Items for Next Meeting

Parental Involvement (Dennis Moore)
AYP Process
Native American Continuing Issues in Special Education
MYLIF—Youth Leadership—Students with Disabilities
Juvenile Detention—Services Available
Update—IDEA Reauthorization
(Meet at MSDB—WyAnn Northrup)
Annual Performance Report

Next Meeting Date: March 17-18, 2005, in Helena

Gary Perleberg moved to adjourn the meeting. Diana Colgrove seconded the motion and the motion passed. The meeting adjourned at Noon.